

## II

### COMMEMORATION SERMON<sup>1</sup>

THIS service of commemoration to which we now come, and rightly come, as the beginning of this day of reunion and rejoicing, is at once a memorial and a eucharist, a service of grateful remembrance and thoughtful thanksgiving as before God and man.

“There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance;  
pray, love, remember; and there is pansies,  
that’s for thoughts.”

So the great master of English speech has the “gentle Ophelia” give pathetic utterance to a very deep longing of the human heart, perhaps the deepest, the longing for thoughtful and loving remembrance; and it is in glad response to the unuttered appeal of that longing that we would now, before all else in this day’s celebration, lift up consciously into our minds and hearts those of our comrades of yesterday who answer not to our call to-day, who walk here these halls with us no more, that we may have fellowship with them yet once again.

Aycock; Cain; Coates; Haltom; Hines; Killough; Lillard; Manaker; Marshall; McGuire; Patterson; Reynolds; Rudd; South; Stell; Wood.

These are they of the brotherhood who have fought the fight and kept the faith even unto death. Worthy sons of

<sup>1</sup> Sermon preached by Peter Gray Sears, Rector of Christ Church, Houston, Texas, at a special commemorative service held in the Academic Court of the Rice Institute, at nine-thirty o’clock in the morning of Thanksgiving Day, Thursday, November 27, 1919.

worthy sires, who "loved their land with a love far-brought," they have passed nobly on ahead of us within the walls of the Mystic City, "where loyal hearts and true stand ever in the light"; and in affectionate recollection we would speak to them, and say:

"Valiant Hearts, who to your glory came  
Through dust of conflict and through battle flame;  
Tranquil you lie, your knightly virtue proved,  
Your memory hallowed in the Land you loved.

"Proudly you gathered, rank on rank to war,  
As who had heard God's message from afar;  
All you had hoped for, all you had, you gave  
To save mankind; yourselves you scorned to save!"

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." And no life is so honorable or so fruitful as such a death.

With priority of honor and loving remembrance thus given first, as is most justly due, to those who have nobly died, let us turn in grateful recognition and with no less measure of honor to those who have not died but who have nobly lived, and still live, who also went forth as true men to fight the fight and keep the faith, and who have returned and are here with us to-day in glad and thankful reunion.

When we have thought the matter through, we shall see, I think, that the fact of death of the body anywhere or at any time, whether away from home in days of war or at home in days of peace, in every case is wholly incidental, if not indeed more or less accidental; and in no case does it of itself determine the real spiritual worth of a man's work or of the man himself. It is the deliberate inward act of a man's will that measures a man, and not the outward

physical results of that act. For a man to give his life in high and holy devotion to his country's cause, or to any cause, is an act of his will. It may involve the death of his body, or it may not. It does involve his willingness to die. It demands that he "hold not his life dear to himself." But the value of his act is in the inward devotion of his life and the loyalty of service following that devotion, and not in the possible consequent death of his body as the result of that devotion and service. Of two soldiers who go out to the battle together side by side, one receives the shot in his heart, dies, and is buried on the field of honor beneath "The Wooden Cross"; the other lives on through the battle, receives no wound, comes back to his home unscathed; and certainly he has laid down his life for his country's cause just as truly as the one who died.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Never was truer word spoken. But the reality of that love and the greatness of that love is in the willingness to lay down the life, not in the physical consequences of that willingness.

Let us, then, make our tribute of loving gratitude to read:

AD MAJOREM GLORIAM MORTUORUM NEC NON VIVORUM!

And as we say "Hail and Farewell" to the one, so even would we say "Hail and Hearty Welcome" to the other, as we place them both together deep down in the innermost recesses of our grateful hearts, devoutly thanking God for His gift to America of such sons.

THIS nation looks back to-day and thanks God that in a great crisis the children it had nurtured in peace and prosperity suddenly showed the stuff of heroes. They were not afraid to dare and to die when the bugle rang clear across

the quiet fields. Wherever and however duty called, they answered with their lives.

Let the nation also thank God that it still breeds the men who make life great by service and sacrifice; that time and work and pleasure and wealth have not sapped the sources of its inward strength; that it still knows how to dare and to do all in that hour when manhood alone counts and achieves.

As I have been thinking over what I have written and have just spoken to you about these men from the Rice Institute, and the other men of all sorts and conditions from all over this country, of what they went forth to do and what they did in complete self-abandonment, in a spirit so fine that it seemed not even to be conscious of itself as it went to its terrible task as a mere matter of course in the day's duty, I have been led to try to take once more the measure of the meaning of gratitude, of a man's debt—every man's debt—of gratitude to his fellow-men and to God.

The spirit of gratitude is the finest virtue, the fairest and sweetest flower, of personal character. It requires far more refinement and dignity of nature to receive consciously and acknowledge gracefully and gratefully a favor or a gift or a service than it does to render the same to another. The impulse of the crude, unrestrained, undisciplined nature is to stand back from and reject the thought of favor, of being served—to resent the sense of personal obligation. It would prefer to think and to feel and to say of itself, "I am independent!" No! No human being in all this world is or ever was independent; and the sense of independence is engendered in men only by crass ignorance and selfishness and vulgar arrogance. All stately souls bow themselves graciously in gratitude and thankfulness before both God

and their fellow-men. Gratitude is ever the authentic sign of the true man, the true gentleman, the highest type of man. And why? Because the one plainest fact of human life everywhere, of whatever rank or station, of whatever sort or condition, is the fact of God's service to man—a service, let us never forget, which we see rendered, not only and not chiefly in the beneficent arrangements of material nature, but more plainly and more emphatically and more really in man's service to man. The divine is always serving and ministering to the human, we say; yes, undoubtedly so; but if that declaration has any clear and definite meaning to us, it means that this service is rendered ever and at its best through human agencies, through other men. The one divinest thing in the world that we know, *i.e.*, the good, the best, the highest, the noblest that is in man—the spiritual image and likeness to God in which he is made—is always serving his fellow-men. And it is just in proportion as we become conscious of our fellow-men, just as we come really to know them, and to know what they have done and are ever doing, that we come to be possessed of the spirit of gratitude and thankfulness—of gratitude and thankfulness first to our fellow-men and then quickly through them to God. If we are not grateful, it is simply because we do not know, we are ignorant of both men and God; and then we are but little, if at all, better than the beasts of the field, for we have lost the humanness of human life, and losing that we have lost consciousness of all divineness and glory in any life, and living becomes only a beastly scramble and fight for material gain.

IN his Thanksgiving Day Proclamation of 1914, President Wilson wrote :

Our people have looked upon their own life with a deeper comprehension; they have been quickened by a great moral stimulation; *they have had themselves revealed to themselves.*

It was two years and more before we went into the war when he wrote that; and if it was true then that "we had ourselves revealed to ourselves," it is a thousand times truer to-day after having gone into the war. And if we have ever known, or if we are ever to know, one another in this country, we know now. And what we know beyond all question and doubt is this—that every element of the whole citizenship of our country, the highest and the lowest, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, the strong and the weak, the high and the lowly, money-man and working-man, white man and red man and black man—all of them—have gone in the person of their sons to strive and to dare and to do even to the mouth of death and of hell for the protection of their country. And to-day all of our liberties, our institutions, our prosperity, our property, our homes, our very life, all that we have and all that we are, we owe absolutely to the service and sacrifice of these brave and true sons of all these various elements of our citizenship.

There is the measure of the "debt of gratitude" resting upon us here in America; AND THERE ARE THEY TO WHOM WE OWE IT. We may not in any relationship ever overlook or forget those men who fought the bitter fight for us and who won the victory whose fruits we now enjoy and shall continue to enjoy through the years to come. These "others have labored, and we have entered into the fruits of their labor."

To what final thought does all this lead us? We, the people here in these United States, all of us alike, are bound to-

gether under the everlasting and unchangeable laws of Almighty God into one living body, one organism, one great family, in which every member and all the members serve and are dependent upon every other and all the other members. The farthest distance between any two elements of our citizenship is the distance between two individual members of the same family, or the distance of your head from your foot in your living body. And no one member of such corporate life, in governmental or industrial or economic or other relationship, can for a moment forget or overlook any other member without being guilty of treachery to the body; and treachery in any organic relationship is a capital offense.

If, therefore, we are indeed thus mutually dependent upon one another, members one of another, bound together in every direction in interdependent relationship, merged into a common life, then, if one member suffers, all the others suffer with it; if one is honored, all the others rejoice with it; and it is not possible for any one element of our citizenship to go forward except as the whole goes forward together.

I make my earnest plea to-day that we strive to realize more and more the unity of our common life in America in an ever-growing sense of gratitude one to another as we see and recognize the mutual service we are rendering one to another.

As the result of this splendid gathering at Rice's first reunion, and especially of this Service of Commemoration, my prayer to God is that we shall not only lift up to-day into our thought and love those of our companions who have "gone West," or those who have come back, but that we shall also, not only to-day but all days, lift up equally into our thought and sympathy and into our devotion of service every element of the whole people of this country, that so

none shall be forgotten or overlooked, that we shall realize and know that as one people together we shall stand in mutual trust and confidence and common effort and service—or we shall not stand at all.

PETER GRAY SEARS.